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## THE FIRST WORDS OF COMMON SENSE: A CLOSER LOOK AT BLANQUISM

NONPOLITICS ANARCHISM, BLANQUI

I originally wrote this essay on Blanquism in 2014 while part of a communist organization. While there are parts of it that I would rewrite now, in general, I think it holds up pretty well as a critical evaluation of the military and political aspects of Blanquism as a complement to my book on Blanqui.

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*"But suppose that a man who is sincere, who puts aside this fantastic mirage of programmes, these fogs of the kingdom of Utopia, who leaves the domain of fiction so as to return to reality – suppose such a man makes a serious and practical statement: 'Disarm the bourgeoisie, arm the people, this is the primary requirement, the sole guarantee of the salvation of the revolution.' Oh! Then indifference vanishes; a long howl of fury echoes from one end of France to the other. There are cries of sacrilege, of parricide, of hydrophobia. Anger is stirred up, unleashed against this man; he is damned to the infernal gods for having modestly spelled out the most basic words of common sense."*

Louis-Auguste Blanqui<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to Blanqui, who declared 'seriously and practically' what was necessary in order to win, most of the contemporary left has lowered its horizons of common sense or what is possible. The contemporary left remains mired in treadmill activism, attending protest upon protest with no long term vision or strategy of how to bring their ideas to life. Their dreams of 'revolution' are really reforms which amount to little more than the slightly modified capitalism of a Swedish-style welfare state. It is high time to break thinking within these sterile formulas and to ask the question "what is needed in order to win?" This means thinking ahead to an armed confrontation with the forces of the bourgeois state and developing an appropriate military doctrine. Those who neglect such questions because the moment is 'premature' are in reality renouncing the conquest of power. For if you wait until the revolutionary moment is upon you to earnestly plan for it, then it is already too late and you are only digging your own grave. Yet to the partisans of gradualism and reform those who earnestly consider the means necessary to win (such as Lenin) are always stigmatized with the name of "Blanqui." Yet the name of Blanqui is not something we should run from. While keeping in mind his weaknesses, we should embrace his approach of honestly, soberly and seriously thinking about what is needed in order to develop the organization, strategy, and military doctrine required for victory.

**I. Who has iron, has bread**

Although Blanqui did not possess any well-developed theory of political economy or class struggle, he did grasp a very clear truth that “there is a war to the death between the classes that compose the nation.”<sup>2</sup> This chasm was unbridgeable and it could only be overcome via communist revolution. Blanqui scoffed at the ideas of reformists who believed that they could capture the state via elections or appeal to the better nature of the ruling class. Rightfully, Blanqui recognized the nature of the state as “the gendarmerie of the rich against the poor.”<sup>3</sup> The ruling class, as shown throughout history, would never willingly surrender its power and privileges without a struggle.

Blanqui spoke of the inadequacy of even the most well-meaning reforms to fix underlying social ills:

The extension of political rights, electoral reform and universal suffrage may be excellent things, but only as means, not as ends. Our goal is the equal sharing of the burdens and the benefits of society; it is the complete establishment of the reign of equality. Without this radical reorganisation all formal modifications in government would be nothing but lies, all revolutions nothing but comedies performed for the benefit of an ambitious few.<sup>4</sup>

While the reforming socialists of Blanqui's day recognized that class division, they shrunk from the implications of that acknowledgment. As opposed to seriously thinking of the means of putting an end to the rule of capital, and developing the means to win, the reformers carried on the same failed methods which have not gotten a step closer to socialism in the last 200 years (in Blanqui's day reformers such as Louis Blanc, in the early 20th century the German SPD and later the social democrats across the world). While the methods of reformers have mitigated to a slight degree the exploitation of workers in the first world, they have not altered the underlying class system in the centers of imperialism, furthermore, they have joined forces with imperialism to enforce the horrors of capitalist exploitation across the world. That is the most charitable view that can be given to them. Furthermore, reformers (and utopians) assumed that history was ‘on their side,’ that they were the representatives of progress and believed that their victory was preordained. This denied the essential role of revolutionary action in bringing about communism. For Blanqui “I am not of those who claim that progress is self-evident, that humanity cannot go back...No, there was no inevitable, otherwise the history of humanity, which is written by the hour, is all written in advance.”<sup>5</sup>

And it wasn't that the reformers advocated a different (i.e. reformist) road as opposed to a revolutionary one to the same end. Rather, the reformers of Blanqui's day, just like their social democratic descendents, ultimately acted as a brake on revolutionary struggle and the handmaidens of capital in the murder of revolutionary workers and communists (from Louis Blanc to Gustav Noske to Guy Mollet). As Blanqui said in an 1851 work, *Warning to the People*: “What obstacle threatens the revolution of tomorrow? It is the same obstacle that blocked the revolution of yesterday – the deplorable popularity of bourgeois disguised as tribunes.”<sup>6</sup>

For Blanqui, reformers who protected the interests of capitalism under a socialist guise were not another section of the working class movement, they were its implacable enemies and its executioners.

The utopians fell into a similar error. While they recognized the injustices of class society and the division between classes, they believed classes could be reconciled via an appeal to the better nature of the rulers. Utopians of Blanqui's day were willing to appeal not only to the bourgeoisie to bring about a better society, but also to aristocrats and kings. As Blanqui rightfully pointed out: “Yes, gentlemen, this is the war between rich and poor: the rich wanted it so, for they are the aggressors. And yet they think it wrong that the poor resist.”<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, the utopian projects for an ideal society, however admirable, were blueprints divorced from the existing class struggle. This led them to focus on schemes such as cooperatives or mutual aid programs not as complement to the class struggle, but in place of it. Blanqui had nothing but contempt for Proudhonists who scorned the class struggle and the need for political action. And he went so far as to say of the utopians that “those who pretend to have in their pocket a complete map of this unknown land – they truly are the madmen.”<sup>8</sup> For him, the utopians were not grounded in the actual material conditions and were denying the role of human action in bringing about communism, replacing revolutionary praxis by idle speculation and appeals to gradualism and false teleology.

For Blanqui, it was clear that the revolution could only come via force of arms – “Arms and organisation, these are the decisive elements of progress, the serious means of putting an end to destitution!”<sup>9</sup> That meant it was imperative for workers and revolutionaries to be trained in the use of arms and military tactics. And this is certainly a lesson that has been learned throughout history that only revolutions which have been able to defend themselves have prevailed (Russia, China, Cuba, Vietnam, etc). On the other hand, revolutions which, in advance, reject or deny the use of arms have been defeated (Chile). As Blanqui recognized, to deny the use of arms is not to pursue a peaceful or bloodless road to socialism. To preach disarmament is ultimately to dig the grave of revolutionaries since they will be powerless to resist the capitalist system which will not hesitate to crush any challengers. As Blanqui argued and has been proved by subsequent history, the use of arms is the only way to power.

These observations are not meant to deny Blanqui's weaknesses in regard to revolutionary struggle (for him, revolution was an act of will). He effectively denied any use of the avenues opened up by legal struggle or elections (which revolutionaries from Marx, Lenin, Mao and Trotsky recognized). And as we shall develop through this essay, his conception of armed struggle, revolutionary organization and conspiracy had serious drawbacks. All that said, Blanqui was absolutely correct to recognize the bankruptcy of reformist and utopian solutions to the contradictions of capitalism, and that the only way to overcome them was by communist revolution. And in that sense, we should all, without hesitation, proudly proclaim ourselves to be Blanquists.

## II. Knowing the Terrain

For Blanqui, it was taken for granted that the decisive revolutionary engagement would occur in a major urban center such as Paris. That victory would come by way of striking at the centers of political and repressive power of the ruling regime, the distribution of arms to insurgent populace. For a planned insurrection to succeed though required not just arms, training and organization, but also investigating where the planned engagements were to take place.

Blanqui spent his life studying how to succeed in an insurrection. Although he failed, there is still much to learn from his method of investigation. For Blanqui, an insurrectionist needed not only to know the centers of political and repressive power in a city, but from the strategy and tactics which would expedite success. The development of appropriate tactics and strategies depended upon knowing:

A. where to attack (where was the enemy undefended and where insurgents could take advantage). An attack should be delivered where the stakes are highest with the greatest possible resources at the command of the insurgent forces.

B. the best defensive positions (what buildings are the most defensible, where could barricades be constructed which would best neutralize the enemy's superiority in numbers and firepower).<sup>10</sup>

C. Knowing the forces at the command of the enemy. Investigate how they are deployed, where, in what strength and in number. Learn how the enemy would act in battle so that you can anticipate their contingency plans. While an insurrection is likely to catch the enemy unprepared, you should know how to take advantage of this and to follow it up with blow upon blow. However, an enemy force likely has an idea of how they would operate in case of an insurrection. If possible, learn what that plan is, or learn to anticipate their movement.

D. Know the forces at your command. How many can you count on? What are their strengths and weaknesses in terms of training, organization, and morale? You should know who is at your command and what they can do. The advantage of insurgent forces lies not only in arms, and organization, but in their political consciousness. The soldiers of a revolutionary force should be willing to fight and win with the certainty of the justice of their cause.

E. Where can you hide? Where can you set up obstacles? Make use of the terrain to facilitate the movement of insurgent forces (such as by use of flying columns).

F. Knowing the terrain means that also that you also know where to block off the line of sight for the enemy and are able to develop positions for ambush (such as on rooftops, sewers or on crowded streets where enemy troops have restricted movement). However, if you don't use the advantages that come from ambushes and surprises, you will lose it to the enemy. Investigation also entails the development of a plan of battle (or strategy) for a particular campaign. A strategy should have a clear objective (the overthrow of the enemy regime and the establishment of revolutionary power) and tactics should be in pursuit of this end.<sup>11</sup> Knowledge of the terrain means not only knowing where to initially strike in an insurrection, but also how to follow up your offensive, maintain the initiative and control where the next engagement will take place. And if you control where the engagement is fought, then you can determine on what terms the enemy will meet you in battle. However, it is important to be able to keep the initiative throughout the course of a campaign; if you lose it and if the enemy is still sufficiently strong and intact, they will be able to keep it.

Knowledge of the terrain of engagement allows the insurgent force to know not only where to strike, defend and in what capacity, but enables revolutionaries to coordinate their forces and to possess freedom of action during a campaign. If you possess freedom of movement and action, you not only control the terms of engagement, but choose the right moment to strike (where the advantage is most in your favor and your enemy is at their greatest disadvantage) and keep the adversary guessing. Blanqui grasped the central truth of Sun Tzu that "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles."<sup>12</sup>

### III. The Plan of Battle

As discussed above, for Blanqui an insurgent force needed to take the offensive and a plan of battle in order to win. Blanqui's plans depended on organization (disciplined by reliable revolutionaries with a clear chain of command), arms with a clear strategy (insurrection and the seizure of key points in a city) and objective (the establishment of a revolutionary regime). It is true that the offensive and surprise allows the attacker to have control of the field of engagement, but this is not a permanent feature of battle. Eventually, the enemy will be on their guard and launch their own counter-strikes which will likely be able to throw off the best-planned offensives.

Blanqui made the error of codifying his ideas on insurrection which fell into the error of fixed rules for insurrection. Blanqui only really possessed a single codified means of insurrection, which just needed to be put into effect. He could not account for chance or accidents in war. He could not grasp what the Prussian general, Helmuth Graf von Moltke, understood so well, "No plan of operations extends with certainty beyond the first encounter with the enemy's main strength."<sup>13</sup> Blanqui's lack of this knowledge handicapped his insurrectionary efforts. He did not possess the flexibility in his conception of revolutionary war to perceive that strategy needed to be more fluid. Although insurgents needed an overall plan of battle, he did not grasp Moltke's other dictum that "Strategy is a system of expedients. It is more than a discipline; it is the transfer of knowledge to practical life, the continued development of the original leading thought in accordance with the constantly changing circumstances."<sup>14</sup>

No plan of battle survives contact with the adversary because of unforeseen contingencies did not mean that planning was to be discarded. Rather, planning needed a critical method of analysis and flexibility which Blanqui lacked. A commander needed the ability to rapidly respond and adapt to a changing situation on the ground. Blanqui did not possess a view of strategic planning with the required level of critical thinking and flexibility.

### IV. Organization and the Will to Win

In order to bring about a successful communist revolution, Blanqui believed that an organization was needed which would serve as the general staff of the insurgent masses to guide them to victory. Blanqui's assertion was based on decades of practical experience and reflection on failed insurrections in Paris which was due to their lack of organization.

In his 1866 work, *Instructions for an Armed Uprising*, Blanqui presented his mature views on the subject of organization and insurrection. When Blanqui reflected on previous Parisian insurrections such as the June Days of 1848 (when the workers of Paris revolted against the Second Republic), he observed that while the workers were sure of success and the government possessed only demoralized troops, the government still won. Blanqui said that the reason for the failure of the workers was that the workers lacked organization.

The lack of organization prevented the revolutionary insurgents from coordinating their defense, strategy, clear chain of command, communication, and allocation of resources. As he said,

The essential point is to organise ourselves. Enough of these tumultuous uprisings, with ten thousand isolated individuals, acting haphazardly, in disarray, without any thought for the collective, with everyone in their own corner and following their own whim! Enough of these ill-conceived and ill-placed barricades that waste time, block the

streets and prevent movement, which is just as necessary to one party as the other. The republican must be free to move as easily as the troops.<sup>15</sup>

One advantage that insurgents possessed against the enemy is that they were motivated by a revolutionary ideal. And this meant that the revolutionaries knew not only what they were fighting against (capitalism and reaction), but what they were fighting for ("the benefit of labour against the tyranny of capital").<sup>16</sup> This means that a revolutionary force will fight differently than its enemy (lack of torture, avoid indiscriminate killing, treating prisoners humanely, etc.). While an insurrection may fight differently than its enemy, it needed the will to win and that means a unified organization, command, program, and overall strategy. Also, the clear recognition that insurgents are fighting for a just cause would also draw the oppressed masses to their side.

Let us discuss a single point here: the will to win. As Blanqui realized, a revolution motivated by a new idea could work wonders in the insurgent masses. A revolutionaries motivated to win would seize the initiative and take the offensive during an insurrection. They would press their advantage against the enemy to the fullest. Ironically, Blanqui the firm and unshakeable atheist believed that to carry out a revolution, you needed an act of faith. And he says:

Revolutions desire men who have faith in them. To doubt their triumphs is to already betray them. It is through logic and audacity that one launches them and saves them. If you lack these qualities, your enemies will have it over you; they will only see one thing in your weaknesses — the measure of their own forces. And their courage will grow in direct proportion with your timidity.<sup>17</sup> Blanqui's ethic is clear, if you lack the will to win or hesitate in carrying out what the revolution demands of you, not only will you lose to the enemy, but you are a traitor to the cause you claim to serve.

While Blanqui praised the morale, faith and energy of the revolutionaries, he noted that belief in the communist ideal was not enough to win against the superior organization and arms of the enemy. Due to the lack of organization, the Parisian workers did not see the big picture. For example, workers would only defend their own neighborhoods and would not concern themselves with what was going on elsewhere. This meant that while the government soldiers could focus their energies on a particular section of barricades since the workers didn't have an organization to coordinate, communicate, or plan overall strategy in a manner that would ensure victory. This allowed the government to pick apart the barricades one by one without worrying about a single unified defense. As Blanqui said, summing up the failure of the insurgents:

They lack that sense of unity and solidarity which, in leading them to coordinate their efforts towards one and the same goal, thereby fosters all those very qualities that isolation renders powerless. They lack organisation, without which they have no chance. Organisation means victory; dispersal means death.<sup>18</sup>

Blanqui's remarks should not be read as a dismissal of dispersion and in favor of a completely centralized command and organization. He recognized that workers motivated by a revolutionary ideal would display greater initiative and daring compared with the forces of the enemy, so long as they were part of overall operations. While initiative is key to the tactics of insurrection, it makes sense only if one is able to keep it. An insurrection cannot succeed if it is based on passive defense of a position since the enemy will be on the offensive and deciding the terms of the engagement and, most likely, defeat for the revolution.

As Engels also observed:

Firstly, never play with insurrection unless you are fully prepared to face the consequences of your play. Insurrection is a calculus with very indefinite magnitudes, the value of which may change every day; the forces opposed to you have all the advantage of organisation, discipline and habitual authority; unless you bring strong odds against them, you are defeated and ruined. Secondly, the insurrectionary career once entered upon, act with the greatest determination, and on the offensive. The defensive is the death of every armed rising; it is lost before it measures itself with its enemies. Surprise your antagonists while their forces are scattering; prepare new successes, however small but daily; keep up the moral ascendant which the first successful rising has given to you; rally thus those vacillating elements to your side which always follow the strongest impulse, and which always look out for the safer side; force your enemies to a retreat before they can collect their strength against you; in the words of Danton, the greatest master of revolutionary policy yet known: *de l'audace, de l'audace, encore de l'audace!*<sup>19</sup>

While Blanqui's case for an insurrection organization with clear leadership, coordination, communication, strategy, program and fired by revolutionary faith is strong, his weakness comes in focusing wholly on the technical or military end and his neglect of political agitation (something we will expand on below). Blanqui did not really deal with the question of adequate preparatory work among the masses to build a base for revolutionary politics. And he simply assumed that on the day of the revolution that the masses would simply rally to the leadership of his organization. This was not only a false assumption, but proved to be a fatal one. Every insurrection that Blanqui launched, however adequately prepared in a military sense failed due to the lack of mass participation (and for misjudging the ripeness for a revolutionary situation).

## V. The Art of Conspiracy and Internal Security

### A. Conspiracy

For Blanqui, the use of art of conspiracy by revolutionaries was not done out of misplaced romanticism of that what struggle entails (he was adamantly opposed to such sentiments). Rather, Blanqui adopted the art of conspiracy because it was a practical necessity. For Blanqui, it was obvious that if you planned an insurrection the details for this needed to be kept secret. Indeed, there is sensitive information which revolutionaries need to keep secret from the forces of the class enemy.

Open political activity was denied to Blanqui and communist revolutionaries in France throughout the nineteenth century. Open oppositional political agitation was bound to invite state repression (ranging from the confiscation of newspapers, the breakup of organizations, prison terms, execution, etc.). Blanqui saw clearly that state and the police supported the interests of the capitalist class, the enemy of workers and communist revolutionaries.

For Blanqui, the names of members and plans needed to be kept secret from the enemy. This was basic security. It was not possible to have open discussion on plans for a coup d'etat since the police would inevitably infiltrate and put a stop to these operations. When it came to the name of members, Blanqui's conspiratorial groups were organized in a hierarchical cell structure so that a member would only know a few other names, that way if he was arrested, the organization would not utterly destroyed. Blanqui, who was at the top of the organizational pyramid, possessed a complete list of members (a leadership should know the forces at their command). However, these lists were guarded tightly. For example, when the leadership was raided in the 1830s,

the first thing Blanqui and his comrades did was to destroy the names. In this way, while the police may have been able to arrest certain members, enough revolutionaries remained at liberty that the whole organization was not fatally compromised. It was also important for an organization to hide their movements from the forces of the state since they possessed agents, informers, wreckers and infiltrators whose job it was to disrupt and destroy any revolutionary organization. This meant not only should revolutionaries be very selective about who was welcomed in the group (secret societies required a member to be vouched for by several others and to take an oath). This also meant that meeting spaces had to be secure, inconspicuous, and possess escape routes. Furthermore, the art of conspiracy also means having the ability to deceive your adversary in a number of ways (the use of false papers, safe houses, coded means of communication, the production of arms, storage of equipment, etc). Secrecy was also needed in the training of members in political line, the clandestine arts, and the use of arms.

#### *B. The Snitch jacket*

The forces of the police could infiltrate revolutionary organization and arrest its members, and pay informers to provide them with information. One of the most damaging methods of police disruption to the Blanquist revolutionaries was done via snitch-jacketing of members. A snitch-jacket is where someone is accused by a police agent of being a government informant in order to destroy their credibility. Blanqui himself was a victim of snitch-jacketing in 1848 during the Second Republic. During this period, Blanqui was engaged in open revolutionary agitation and becoming a pole of revolutionary attraction to the oppressed masses. Yet there was rivalry and dissension in his organization with another headstrong revolutionary named Armand Barbès. To blunt this, the government released the "Taschereau document" which claimed to provide evidence from police archives that Blanqui was actually a police informer. The document was clearly aimed to undermine Blanqui's revolutionary integrity and his support among the masses.

Blanqui had to stop his political activism for a period of several weeks to refute the document (which he was able to do successfully). Yet the damage was done. While most revolutionaries took Blanqui's side against the false accusations, some prominent activists (ex. Armand Barbès) accepted the police disinformation. The disinformation split the revolutionary forces, causing hate, division and poisoned atmosphere when common struggle was most needed.

The key lessons from the "Taschereau document" are the following:

- i.* The police were able to exacerbate existing personal tensions between revolutionaries (Blanqui and Barbès). They used gossip, rumor, rivalry and innuendo which had been under the surface for months (in fact, dating back to Blanqui and Barbès' common imprisonment after the insurrection of 1839). The police were able to exploit these already existing tensions to cause an open breach.
- ii.* Blanqui's organization had no means to frankly discuss and resolve (both personal and political) issues raised gossip, rumor and police methods.
- iii.* Barbès error was to accept the police disinformation at face value. In other words, there was no effort at investigation. Extraordinary claims need extraordinary evidence. We need facts, double-checking information and corroboration of any claims before acting.
- iv.* Blanqui correctly exposed the true source behind the disinformation: the government and the police forces (since they were the ones who benefited). When confronted with bogus stories, revolutionaries should disavow and expose them as publicly as possible.

#### *C. Counter-intelligence*

Revolutionary organizations should possess a means of dealing with police agents and exposing their operations via counter-intelligence. It is not the place of this essay to give an extensive list of the methods which police agents use.<sup>20</sup> Yet the goal of the police is to disrupt the operations of revolutionary organizations and to prevent them from carrying out political work. Some methods have been described above, others include: spreading rumor, gossip, creating paranoia, bogus material put out by an agent to discredit the group, forged correspondence, provocation and misinformation.<sup>21</sup>

In every social battle, a certain percentage of excesses, abuses and errors cannot be avoided. The duty of the party and of all revolutionaries is to work to limit these. For example, the Blanquist revolutionary organization of the 1860s had a counter-intelligence system formed by Raoul Rigault which effectively rid them of infiltrators. Rigault made it a point to investigate the police and he did this by reading court transcripts where police agents testified, recording as much physical and biographical data as possible. He made it a point to follow the movements of suspected agents to determine if they were on the payroll of the state. Rigault constructed an elaborate intelligence system dealing with police infiltration and was able to neutralize their effectiveness within the Blanquist organization (in 1870 Rigault was able to verify his data when he had access to public files). There is no method that is 100% guaranteed to combat police repression but as Victor Serge argued in his work on the Russian political police, "In every social battle, a certain percentage of excesses, abuses and errors cannot be avoided. The duty of the party and of all revolutionaries is to work to limit these."<sup>22</sup> We should possess a culture among revolutionaries and communists which allows us to have democratic discussion on issues of line and program along with problems which inevitably develop in the course of struggle.

Blanqui's error in conspiracy was not that the names of members, operations, shield movements and sensitive documents had to be hidden from the police. That is a given. Precautions are necessary in revolutionary work in the face of a ruthless enemy. There are some things which revolutionaries can not discuss openly (ex. Blanqui's plans for an insurrection) which will give valuable information to the enemy and ensure defeat. Blanqui's error in regards to conspiracy (which we will discuss further below) is that he believed that the revolution was based wholly on the development of the conspiracy of his organization and not on the actions of the masses (certainly revolutionary leadership is needed in an insurrection, but an insurrection needs popular support if it is to win).

#### **VI. Barricades**

If there is one tactic that was associated with revolutions in Blanqui's time, it was the use of barricades. The successful French Revolutions of 1830 and 1848 (along with the unsuccessful June Days of 1848) all saw the appearance of hundreds of barricades in Paris. The barricade certainly captured the romantic image of revolution with heroic workers and insurgents fighting for liberty standing in defiance against the soldiers of tyranny.

Blanqui's attention to the importance and the nature of the barricade is highlighted by his extended discussion in the Manual for Armed Insurrection. In that work, he discussed in meticulous detail the proper way to construct barricades during an insurrection. Blanqui believed that barricades needed to provide cover for insurgents, block the movement of enemy troops and be able to withstand heavy fire.

Although Blanqui believed that barricades were essential to the success of any revolutionary insurrection, he criticized the haphazard manner in which barricades were constructed in June of 1848. He said that the planned construction of barricades must be decided upon in advance of the insurrection by the revolutionary organization. The reason for this was that insurgents in June 1848 aimlessly constructed barricades, most of which were undefended and captured with little struggle by enemy troops. Blanqui describes the situation in June as follows: "In June there were more than six hundred barricades: thirty at most bore the brunt of the fighting. Of the others, at nineteen out of every twenty not a single shot was fired. Hence those glorious reports relating the sensational capture of fifty barricades where not a soul was to be found."<sup>23</sup>

While Blanqui believes the revolutionary organizations need an overall plan for insurrection, he does hasten to add that in June the main clashes between revolutionaries and soldiers occurred in areas chosen by chance and not necessarily be military utility. Meanwhile, a certain number of barricades that were higher, stronger and better constructed gradually started to attract defenders, who gathered around them. The location of these principal fortifications was determined not by careful calculation but by chance. Only a few, as a result of rudimentary military inspiration, were designed to block the openings of important roads.<sup>24</sup> As we discussed above, Blanqui, rightfully, criticized the lack of coordination and communication between barricade defenders which led to the isolation, demoralization and defeat of the insurrection.

While we agree with Blanqui's overall observations, his focus on the organizational and military side of the barricade means he completely neglects other important consideration in the use of the barricade. Barricade historian Mark Traugott identifies the following practical and social considerations that barricades have served in revolutionary insurrections (some of these overlap with Blanqui, but we are including all of Traugott's points for the sake of completeness). Traugott says that the focus on the military dimensions of barricades ignores that the social side was "more likely to determine the outcome of civil conflict":<sup>25</sup>

- A. Providing protective cover to insurgents from the fire of government troops.
- B. To bar the passage of the enemy and to impede the circulation of outsiders in the insurgent zone.
- C. Halt the movement of troops, to cut off their lines of supply, barracks, armories, storehouses and to deprive the enemy of intelligence relating to the insurgents. This disrupts the enemy's chain of command and their logistical superiority, providing for a more equal footing between the two sides.
- D. To mobilize the insurgent masses and to show their outright defiance of the regime and to win over the general population (particularly those who are neutral) and draw them into the struggle. Barricade construction had a way of captivating outsiders.
- E. To claim turf, challenge the legitimacy of the regime and build solidarity. The rituals of the insurgents in announcing barricade construction and in suspending the ordinary routine by challenging the government helped to build a sense of shared solidarity. Barricade construction also meant that the insurgents needed the use of tools, materials, vehicles etc along with arms and ammunition which needed to be requisitioned from the populace. If the populace was sympathetic to the insurgent cause, this created a sense of community and an alternative set of authority to that of the government. And if the insurgents defended their positions via force of arms and the general population obeyed their authority and not that of the government, this created a situation of dual power.
- F. The construction of barricades was also a way to gauge popular support and the possibilities for success. A negative example of this is provided by Blanqui's own coup in 1839. During that period, the Society of Seasons constructed barricades to defend key points that were originally seized during the revolt. However, the populace did not assist in their construction. The lack of popular involvement helped to doom the success of Blanqui's coup, despite the heroism of the insurgents. As Traugott argues, barricades created "a space that fostered social interactions – among the rebels to be sure, but also between them and the public – and thus allowed these various parties to gauge the costs and benefits of progressing to the stage of outright hostilities."<sup>26</sup>

G. Creating an appropriate level of insurgent organization. While Blanqui argued for greater coordination and a command structure for barricade defenders, the construction of barricades in an insurrection meant the development of some kind of coordination in the heat of battle. However the relation between the spontaneity and structure came up in each insurrection. While the revolutionary energy of the masses manifested itself in their daring to fight and win in the face of the enemy, they were also hampered by the lack of a general command. For example, insurgents would rebel against the discipline and the structures of the old regime, but would neglect to develop their own (with a clear chain of command, knowledge of the bigger picture, able to distribute arms and ammunition, able to plan maneuvers).

H. The emergence of a division of labor. Traugott argues that while barricade construction in insurrection never involved a clear choice between spontaneity and structure, in fact initially distinctions of class, gender and race would be erased temporarily in the face of a common enemy (which was part of the power of the barricade as a symbol). Yet Traugott goes on and says that "as the insurrectionary situation progressed from incipient combat to lethal conflict, the confusion that initially reigned behind the barricade gave way to an informal hierarchical order – one that mirrored, however imperfectly, arrangements in society at large. The logic of the barricade began to restructure the social as well as the physical space that the insurgents sought to control."<sup>27</sup> During the nineteenth century, barricade fighting involved including previously underrepresented and/or oppressed groups in an insurrection (such as women during the Paris Commune). Yet as a revolution developed, a clear division of labor would be necessary for the insurgents if they to prevail (those with knowledge of construction would be more valuable in construction while those with military experience would generally be listened to by insurgents).

I. Barricades serve as a space to allow for insurgents to fraternize with the army and the police. The military forces of the state possess superiority in terms of arms, organization and discipline over those of a revolutionary force. However, if armed forces moved on insurgent positions, there was the possibility that the soldiers would refuse to fire. As Traugott says, "the goal of insurgents was, of course, to break down that isolation, communicate directly with troops, and sap their willingness to fight by putting a human face on the insurrection and its goals."<sup>28</sup> However, such appeals were not always guaranteed to succeed.

Insurgent who exposed themselves to the army to appeal to them were just as likely to be shot dead. Yet the barricade, in providing cover, allowed the rebels to appeal to the soldiers without necessarily being killed. For soldiers, the effect of seeing unarmed civilians (particularly women and children) sometimes had the effect of causing the soldiers to refuse to follow orders and go over to the enemy. Blanqui recognized that the army fought unwillingly against the masses and that an important task for insurgents was to neutralize dissatisfied soldiers by isolating them:

In civil struggles, the great majority of soldiers march only with reluctance, under constraint and after a good swig of brandy. They would certainly rather be elsewhere, and are more willing to look behind than ahead of them. But an iron hand keeps them as slaves and victims of a pitiless discipline. Without any affection for the power they are defending, they obey only out of fear and are incapable of acting on their own initiative. A cut-off detachment is a lost detachment. Their commanders are well aware of this; their primary concern is to maintain communications with all their forces. Part of their strength is absorbed in meeting this need.<sup>29</sup>

Blanqui in writing his *Instructions for an Armed Uprising* essentially wrote a set of rules (fixed instructions) for an urban revolution that were supposed to be rigorously followed by insurgents. However, he neglected to take into account adaptations on the side of the bourgeois state which diminished the military ability of barricades: improved communications, the development of railroads, the use of artillery which could obliterate most barricades, etc.<sup>30</sup> During the later nineteenth century, urban planning was developed to secure cities against civil war (the most famous being Baron Haussmann's restructuring of Paris during the Second Empire). For Haussmann, urban planning was designed to make the construction of barricades impossible by widening the streets and to building new streets to furnish the shortest distance between barracks and working class districts.

These developments were noted by Engels who observed in his 1895 *Introduction to Marx's Class Struggles in France* that the classical era of street fighting and barricade construction of Blanqui's time had come to an end. Engels advocated socialists should focus on legal struggle since a frontal clash with the army was bound to lead to defeat. While advocates of the peaceful road and revisionism within the socialist parties would turn Engels into a proponent of legality at any price (Engels protested that his work was heavily edited for publication by the German Social Democrats), this was not his actual position. Engels believed that while the conditions against street-fighting had grown more unfavorable to revolutionaries since 1848, he argued in future insurrections, these disadvantages could be compensated by other factors in their favor. One task Engels believed socialists needed to undertake was to gain influence in the army in order to weaken their morale in the face of an urban insurrection:

Let us have no illusions about it; a real victory of insurrection over the military in street fighting, a victory as between two armies, is one of the rarest exceptions. And the insurgents counted on it just as rarely. For them it was solely a question of making the troops yield to moral influences ... If they succeed in this, the troops fail to respond, or the commanding officers lose their heads, and the insurrection wins. If they do not succeed in this, then, even where the military are in the minority, the superiority of better equipment and training, of uniform leadership, of the planned employment of the military forces and of discipline makes itself felt. The most that an insurrection can achieve in the way of actual tactical operations is the proficient construction and defence of a single barricade ... Hence passive resistance is the predominant form of struggle; an attack will be mounted here and there, by way of exception, in the form of occasional thrusts and assaults on the flanks; as a rule, however, it will be limited to the occupation of positions abandoned by retreating troops ...

Even in the classic time of street fighting, therefore, the barricade produced more of a moral than a material effect. It was a means of shaking the steadfastness of the military. If it held out until this was attained, victory was won; if not, the outcome was defeat.

This is the main point which must be kept in view, also when examining the outlook for possible future street fighting.<sup>31</sup>

What Engels was arguing was more akin to a war of position, for socialists to focus on the legal struggle (for the moment), but to build their influence among the masses (among the workers and the army) so that if an insurrection occurs, then socialists will have the sympathy of enough soldiers to make up for their military disadvantage and then street-fighting would not take the form of a passive barricade defense but to take the offensive.

It remains the case that urban insurrection following Blanqui's and Engels' era in the later 19th and 20th centuries led by socialists and communists was not successful (Easter Rising 1916, Berlin 1919, Hamburg 1923, Estonia 1924, Canton 1926, Shanghai 1926-7, Vienna 1934). Yet the successful October Revolution of 1917 did not rely on barricades, but on a carefully timed and executed insurrection led by an organized mass party seizing the key points in a city. In relation to urban insurrection, we should note that the Communist International published a book on *Armed Insurrection*, with instructions for its sections on how to repeat the Bolshevik Revolution via an urban revolution.<sup>32</sup> In the manual, there is a chapter written by Red Army Marshal Tukhachevsky discusses the use of barricades (how they should be constructed, where to set up, digging defensive trenches, type of weapons to use, etc.) during a revolutionary insurrection. One important observation of Tukhachevsky on barricades is worth repeating here:

The defense must be given an active character, for only thus can it hope for success. When defenses are organized and barricades constructed, the defenders must constantly bear in mind the possibility, indeed necessity, of striking swift, decisive blows. To this end, special squads of shock troops must be formed and placed in well-protected positions; their mission will be to attack the enemy at the first opportunity, under cover of the fire from the houses.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the greater sophistication of the Comintern in terms of insurrectionary tactics and strategy, we should note that they universalized the October Road in the same way Blanqui universalized barricades in an insurrection. Neither was flexible enough to consider alternative roads that existed for the seizure of power (ex. Maoist people's war).

While Blanqui understood a great deal of the military uses of barricades during a revolutionary insurrection, he only understood the social utility of them only in a limited sense (which hampered his understanding of insurrection). While Blanqui had practical experience in urban insurrection, he did not take into account the technical adaptations and social control measures on the part of the bourgeois state which made the barricade less effective as a military tactic.

## VII. Consolidation of the Revolutionary Regime

Although Blanqui did not develop any detailed plans for a future communist society, he did think carefully on what revolutionaries needed to do on the morrow of victory. Even though Blanqui was never victorious, he gave serious thought to what was necessary and practical to consolidate a revolutionary regime and to crush the resistance of the enemy.

As we have mentioned, Blanqui recognized that there was an unbridgeable division between the classes in society and that the state served to enforce that division. He believed that as a first step, the revolution must produce another state as the gendarmerie of the poor against the rich. And Blanqui's observation has been brutally confirmed by the judgment of history where every revolution has faced the fierce resistance of the defeated ruling class (Paris Commune, Russia, China, Cuba, Vietnam, Nicaragua, etc.). In this sense, he realized like Marx, that the bourgeois state was something that needed to be smashed since it did not serve the interests of the working class.

It was necessary for the workers to set up their own state (he used the term Committee of Public Safety) which would "dismantle the enemy's means of action, and to organise and maintain those of the Republic."<sup>34</sup> In terms of dissolving the means of action of the enemy, Blanqui believed that it was necessary to completely disarm the forces of the bourgeois such as the army and the police (and hastened to add that without this there would be no salvation). In their place, he advocated the general arming of the working class. The new revolutionary power would also deal swiftly with enemies of the people, such as the leaders of the overthrown government and officers/soldiers who fired on the people. Yet Blanqui understood that not all soldiers or officers were the enemy, those who had committed no crimes against the people were to be won to neutrality.

Furthermore, the new regime would effect what Marx and Engels called despotic "inroads on the rights of private property." After the revolution, the logic of capital was not going to be allowed to perpetuate itself, rather it was going to be broken. This meant the seizure, without compensation, of the property of the capitalists, the aristocracy and the church by the new state. These seized properties were then to be used for the popular benefit. Blanqui believed that the working class would be willing to defend this new society not only by faith in the revolution, but by clear and practical measures that the new regime took to defend their interests.

However, Blanqui did not advocate a class dictatorship of the proletariat (a term he never used) since he did not believe that most of the workers were able to rule themselves since they were influenced by the Church. Rather, he advocated the dictatorship of a revolutionary elite (his own organization) which would also begin educating the people in the mores of a new society since communism was incompatible with ignorance.

Blanqui remained bound to the dictatorship of a revolutionary group and not class rule. For example, when the Paris Commune formed, neither Blanqui nor his followers had any appreciation of the new forms of independent working class politics which it represented. The Blanquists thought only in terms of repeating the measures which the French Revolution of 1793 undertook. That being said, the Blanquists were absolutely correct in their estimation that the Communards needed to act swiftly against the counterrevolution and that the Commune lacked an adequate military organization and command which failed to take the offensive against the enemy.<sup>35</sup>

Yet Blanqui had only very vague ideas on what should happen after a revolution and the transition. He only envisioned the seizure of power in single city after quick fighting. He did not consider what a revolutionary regime would have to do in a prolonged civil war or when surrounded by hostile states (as subsequent socialist regimes had to deal with). Suffice to say, there were many problems and challenges of consolidating a revolutionary regime which Blanqui did not and could not anticipate (establishing a planning system, trade with the outside world, developing institutions of popular power, dealing with prolonged isolation, etc). All this being said, Blanqui was miles ahead of his contemporaries who advocated a reconciliation of classes, changing the world without taking power, or a reformist road to socialism. All of these options are abject failures condemned by the court of history. Despite his weaknesses, Blanqui was absolutely correct that a successful revolution needed to consolidate itself and swiftly break the power of the enemy. This was the only proven way to "reconstitute society on the basis of justice"<sup>36</sup>

### VIII. Blanquism and Marxism

The relationship between Marxism and Blanquism has been shrouded in polemic and obfuscation for the last century. To reform-minded Marxists or revisionists such as Bernstein or Kautsky, any communist movement that took seriously the questions of how to bring about the revolutionary seizure of power and to maintain and retain it is condemned with the label of "Blanquism." As Rosa Luxemburg observed in her polemic, *Reform or Revolution*, Bernstein, thundering against the conquest of political power as a theory of Blanquist violence, has the misfortune of labeling as a Blanquist error that which has always been the pivot and the motive force of human history. From the first appearance of class societies having the class struggle as the essential content of their history, the conquest of political power has been the aim of all rising classes.<sup>37</sup>

Revisionists make the accusation of "Blanquism" against the revolutionary seizure of power because their conception of politics does not allow for breaks, leaps or violence. Rather, they accept the terrain of legal and acceptable struggle as laid out by the parameters of what is acceptable to capitalism. While it is true that reformists and revisionists may accept in theory and principle the revolutionary seizure of power, they only do so on the 100% guarantee of victory or with a 50% + 1 of the vote.

Yet there is never any guarantee of victory, any bold revolutionary endeavor always runs a risk. A communist should of course study a particular situation carefully before deciding to act. Still, if the opportunity for revolution comes, it should be taken and the event pushed as far as it would can go. For if the opportunity for revolution comes and passes, and it is not taken because of hesitation or because we don't know if victory is certain, then those who miss their chance will stand condemned by the masses and history, and they will deserve that condemnation.

And while it is true that we can't know all the facts when we act (which goes to show that no plan of battle survives the initial engagement), we can not wait for the owl of Minerva to fly at dusk (when all the facts are unveiled) because then the moment will have passed us by. Rather, communist political action must act in its particular moment based on incomplete information with flexible conception of action, considering alternative strategies.

Part of the way of developing alternative strategies is to have a theory that can see signs of the unknown. A Marxist theory which is able to identify and analyze contradictions by the visible signs on the horizon is able to be a tool in the development of our revolutionary plans of action. And this means being able to identify the cracks and fault lines which bourgeois society produces, and of course, knowing that revolution will burst through in the most unseen places. As Lenin candidly observed,

We do not and cannot know which spark—of the innumerable sparks that are flying about in all countries as a result of the world economic and political crisis—will kindle the conflagration, in the sense of raising up the masses; we must, therefore, with our new



and communist principles, set to work to stir up all and sundry, even the oldest, mustiest and seemingly hopeless spheres, for otherwise we shall not be able to cope with our tasks, shall not be comprehensively prepared, shall not be in possession of all the weapons and shall not prepare ourselves either to gain victory over the bourgeoisie.<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, this means as Lenin went on that there is no 'pure' revolution, and those who expect one will never live to see it.

Rather, a Marxism able to identify a revolutionary situation<sup>39</sup> and the living class forces/alliances which can bring a movement to power. Yet Blanqui lacked a theory able to analyze and to envision the potential roads to communism. Instead, Blanqui was willing to throw himself into battle at the earliest opportunity, believing that an act of will was enough. And here, his weakness of theory comes forth. He had no theory to analyze social conditions, plan strategy and to decide the right moment to strike. And his organization did not rely on the masses, but was divorced from them. None of this mattered to him because "the duty of a revolutionary is always to struggle, to struggle no matter what, to struggle to extinction."<sup>40</sup> Yet there is an eerie fatalism to all this. We should not throw ourselves into hopeless battle when the conditions are not ripe. Rather, a well-developed theory guided by revolutionary practice is needed for us to be able to win. Blanqui lacked this theory and could only rely on the same failed methods of struggle, which in the end could only produce a tragic hero and not a successful revolution.

In contrast to this, Lenin and the Bolshevik Party were able to lead a successful seizure of power in October 1917 in the Russian capital of Petrograd. As Russia limped from crisis to crisis throughout 1917, Lenin believed that the time had come for the working class, allied with the peasantry and soldiers, to make an armed seizure of power. In distinguishing the Marxist view of armed insurrection from that of Blanquism, Lenin said the following (which we will quote at length):

Marxists are accused of Blanquism for treating insurrection as an art! Can there be a more flagrant perversion of the truth, when not a single Marxist will deny that it was Marx who expressed himself on this score in the most definite, precise and categorical manner, referring to insurrection specifically as an art, saying that it must be treated as an art, that you must win the first success and then proceed from success to success, never ceasing the offensive against the enemy, taking advantage of his confusion, etc., etc.? To be successful, insurrection must rely not upon conspiracy and not upon a party, but upon the advanced class. That is the first point. Insurrection must rely upon a revolutionary upsurge of the people. That is the second point. Insurrection must rely upon that turning-point in the history of the growing revolution when the activity of the advanced ranks of the people is at its height, and when the vacillations in the ranks of the enemy and in the ranks of the weak, half-hearted and irresolute friends of the revolution are strongest. That is the third point. And these three conditions for raising the question of insurrection distinguish Marxism from Blanquism. Once these conditions exist, however, to refuse to treat insurrection as an art is a betrayal of Marxism and a betrayal of the revolution.<sup>41</sup>

So here we have the essence of the Marxist position in regards to revolutionary insurrection. One is that an insurrection must not rely wholly on a conspiracy, but on a revolutionary upsurge of the populace. Secondly, that the revolutionary activity of the masses is growing in intensity. Finally, that the divisions, vacillations among the class enemy must be at their height. All of these conditions differ remarkably from Blanquism in their reliance on a revolutionary party composed of tribunes of the people defending a new state power, supported by workers and other allied classes, and that the party is guided by the advanced political theory of Marxism which is able to formulate a concrete analysis of a concrete situation.

This is not to say that Lenin had the last word on Marxism and the revolutionary seizure of power. During the Chinese revolution, there is a leap in the development of revolutionary warfare as Mao Tse-tung forges an army, which is revolutionized in its structure and manner of warfare, linked to the masses, defends institutions of popular power and relies on the people to carry out a revolutionary war.

## IX. Conclusion

Even though Blanqui was primarily a man of action, he did possess the outlines of a serious theory and practice of communism. He did think about what it takes to make a revolution. We have not tried to minimize or deny Blanqui's weaknesses in theory or practice throughout this essay, but to soberly look at the lessons which he has to teach us for struggle today. Whatever his faults, he could still ask the right questions on what it takes to win, even if his answers were often wrong. The name of Blanqui has been turned into an insult by the partisans of gradualism and reform. We should resurrect it, as the name of commitment, courage and dedication to the communist ideal. And whatever else may be said of Blanqui, he was willing to act. And he was fighting to win, which meant he was serious about the means and the choices which were necessary to reach the goal. And in contrast to the progressives, reformers and utopians, that means recognizing the need for communist conspiracy and secrecy and the necessity of armed revolution.

## Footnotes

1Louis-Auguste Blanqui, "Concerning the Clamour Against the 'Warning to the People,'" *The Blanqui Archive*. <https://blanqui.kingston.ac.uk/texts/concerning-the-clamour-against-the-warning-to-the-people-april-1851/>

2Louis-Auguste Blanqui, "Report to the Society of the Friends of the People." *The Blanqui Archive*. <https://blanqui.kingston.ac.uk/texts/report-to-the-society-of-the-friends-of-the-people-2-february-1832/>

3Quoted in "Presentation of Blanqui," *New Left Review* 1/65 (January-February 1971): 27.

4Louis-Auguste Blanqui, "Democratic Propaganda," *The Blanqui Archive*. <https://blanqui.kingston.ac.uk/texts/democratic-propaganda-1835/>

5Quoted in Michael Löwy, *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's 'On the Concept of History'* (New York: Verso, 2005), 84.

6Louis-Auguste Blanqui, "Warning to the People," *The Blanqui Archive*. <https://blanqui.kingston.ac.uk/texts/warning-to-the-people-25-february-1851/>

7Louis-Auguste Blanqui, "Auguste Blanqui's Defence Speech at the 'Trial of the Fifteen,'" *The Blanqui Archive*. <https://blanqui.kingston.ac.uk/texts/auguste-blanqui-defence-speech-at-the-trial-of-the-fifteen-12-january-1832/>

8 Quoted in Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 736.

9Louis-Auguste Blanqui, "Warning to the People." (note 6).

10We will discuss the use of barricades in a later section.

11Blanqui possessed clear weaknesses in this regard which we will discuss below.

12Sun Tzu, "On the Art of War," *Marxists Internet Archive*. <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/sun-tzu/works/art-of->

war/ch03.htm

13Helmuth Graf von Moltke, *Moltke on the Art of War: Selected Writings*, ed. Daniel J. Hughes (Novato: Presido Press, 1995), 45.

14Ibid. 47.

15Louis-Auguste Blanqui, "Instructions for an Armed Uprising," *The Blanqui Archive*. <https://blanqui.kingston.ac.uk/texts/instructions-for-an-armed-uprising-1868/>

16Ibid.

17"The Imaginary Party' Introduces Blanqui," *Not Bored*, <http://www.notbored.org/blanqui.html>.

18Louis-Auguste Blanqui, "Instructions for an Armed Uprising." (note 15).

19Frederick Engels, "Revolution and Counter-revolution in Germany: Chapter 17 'Insurrection.'" *Marxists Internet Archive*. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/germany/ch17.htm>

20Two excellent sources are Brian Glick, *The War at Home: Covert Action Against US Activists and What We Can Do About It* (Cambridge: South End Press, 1989) on COINTELPRO and Victor Serge, "What Everyone Should Know About State Repression," *Marxists Internet Archive*. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/serge/1926/repression/index.htm> on police methods.

21Lucien de la Hodde, was a French police spy who infiltrated various radical secret societies in the 1830s and 40s. At one point, for the benefit of the police, he identified the following eight groups of people who would most likely join a revolutionary movement. It is kind of a caricature, but interesting look at how police forces view radical activists:

1. The Youth of the Schools – 'students'.

2. The Imbeciles – essentially the unemployed intelligentsia/professionals.

3. The Gypsies – those who never work and never expect to work.

4. The Sovereign People – workers of Paris 'those who believe they are masters of the country'.

5. The Fly Catchers – good men at the bottom, who are 'to be pitied' when they listen to 'foolish or shamelessly newspapers, they are made to see everyday that black is white, and white black'.

6. The Disaffected – those ousted and injured 'in their fortunes and affections' after the fall of previous governments.

7. Political Refugees – 'the abettors of revolt from all countries, drawn among us by an imprudent generosity on our part'.

8. The Bandits – those who steal from the old rulers during a revolution, 'fellows who live off the wealth of others.' See Walter Laqueur, ed., *Voices of Terror: Manifestos, Writings and Manuals of Al Qaeda, Hamas, and Other Terrorists from around the World and Throughout the Ages* (New York: Reed Press, 2004), 171-77.

22Victor Serge, "What Everyone Should Know About State Repression," (note 20).

23Louis-Auguste Blanqui, "Instructions for an Armed Uprising." (note 15).

24Ibid.

25Mark Traugott, *Insurgent Barricade* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 185. The following points have been drawn from pp. 178-224.

26Ibid. 195.

27Ibid. 198.

28Ibid. 208.

29Louis-Auguste Blanqui, "Instructions for an Armed Uprising." (note 15).

30Insurgents attempted to blunt the army's firepower with several barricades, separated by 100 yards, which allowed for the forward line to retreat to more defensible positions. Another method was to construct barricades in the shape of a V, with the point which was aimed at the position from where cannon fire was expected to originate. The force of artillery fire would collapse this section of the barricade, compressing the materials further and preserving the structural integrity. A third method was to tie barricades into adjoining buildings which allowing for greater structural strength and to make use of covering fire from nearby windows. For more detail see Traugott 2010, 216.

31Frederick Engels, "Introduction to Karl Marx's The Class Struggles in France 1848 to 1850." *Marxist Internet Archive*. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1895/03/06.htm>

32For my own writing on the revolutionary military tactics of the Bolshevik Revolution (including the use of barricades) see Doug Enaa Greene, "Leon Trotsky and Revolutionary Insurrection," *Links International Journal for Socialist Renewal*. <http://links.org.au/node/3637>

33A. Neuberg, *Armed Insurrection* (London: New Left Books, 1970), 249.

34Louis-Auguste Blanqui, "Instructions for an Armed Uprising." (note 15).

35For more on this point, see my forthcoming essay *Missing Victory? Blanqui and the Paris Commune*.

36Louis-Auguste Blanqui, "Instructions for an Armed Uprising." (note 15).

37See Reform or Revolution found in Rosa Luxemburg, *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks*, edited by Mary-Alice Waters (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 77.

38"Left-Wing" Communism: An Infantile Disorder," *Lenin Collected Works* (Fourth Edition) 31.99-100. (Henceforth LCW)

39As Lenin says, "The fundamental law of revolution, which has been confirmed by all revolutions and especially by all three Russian revolutions in the twentieth century, is as follows: for a revolution to take place it is not enough for the exploited and oppressed masses to realise the impossibility of living in the old way, and demand changes; for a revolution to take place it is essential that the exploiters should not be able to live and rule in the old way. It is only when the "lower classes" do not want to live in the old way and the "upper classes" cannot carry on in the old way that the revolution can triumph. This truth can be expressed in other words: revolution is impossible without a nation-wide crisis (affecting both the exploited and the exploiters). It follows that, for a revolution to take place, it is essential, first, that a majority of the workers (or at least a majority of the class-conscious, thinking, and politically active workers) should fully realise that revolution is necessary, and that they should be prepared to die for it; second, that the ruling classes should be going through a governmental crisis, which draws even the most backward masses into politics (symptomatic of any genuine revolution is a rapid, tenfold and even hundredfold increase in the

size of the working and oppressed masses—hitherto apathetic—who are capable of waging the political struggle), weakens the government, and makes it possible for the revolutionaries to rapidly overthrow it." Ibid. 84-5.

40Louis-Auguste Blanqui, "Instructions for an Armed Uprising" (note 15).

41"Marxism and Insurrection," *LCW* 26. 22-23. Elsewhere, Lenin summed up the difference between his approach and that of Blanqui: "You cannot disregard the people. Only dreamers and plotters believed that a minority could impose their will on a majority. That was what the French revolutionary Blanqui thought, and he was wrong. When the majority of the people refuse, because they do not yet understand, to take power into their own hands, the minority, however revolutionary and clever, cannot impose their desire on the majority of the people." See "Report on the Results of the Seventh (April) All-Russia Conference of the R.S.D.L.P.(B.) at a Meeting of the Petrograd Organisation," *LCW* 41.433.

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META

CONTACT  
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